

How Jewish is the Christian God?, by Laurent Guyénot - The Unz Review

Apr. 23rd, 2025

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The notion that the Greeks or Romans — or even the Barbarians — were incapable of rising above polytheism to the concept of a universal God, and that Europeans needed Jewish monotheism — in the form of Christianity — to “know” “God”, is the seminal Jewish lie that has alienated us from our Roman past, and ultimately enslaved us to Jewish Power. If the Jews gave us God, then we owe them the world, and they know it.

Before Constantine, Romans were not duped by this kind of chutzpah. Neither did the Jews’ claim that Homer, Pythagoras and Plato learned everything from Moses get much credit among them. And still at the very end of the 4th century, philosopher Maximus of Madaura [tried to explain](#) to his former pupil Augustine:

Who could ever be so frantic and infatuated as to deny that there is one supreme God, without beginning, without natural offspring, who is, as it were, the great and mighty Father of all? The powers of this Deity, diffused throughout the universe which He has made, we worship under many names, as we are all ignorant of His true name, the name God being common to all kinds of religious belief. Thus it comes, that while in diverse supplications we approach separately, as it were, certain parts of the Divine Being, we are seen in reality to be the worshippers of Him in whom all these parts are one.

Two centuries earlier, another Maximus, from Tyre, noted that, despite the variety of religious views, “you will see throughout the world one uniform rule and doctrine, that there is one God, king and father of all things, and many gods,

sons of God and his coregents. The Greek says so, likewise the non-Greek.” I borrow this last quote from Ramsay MacMullen’s book *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, the most informative and insightful that I have ever read on the subject. According to the author, “It appears thus to be a part of the intellectual heritage of the times that god might be one; all ‘gods,’ simply his will at work in various spheres of action.”^[1]

The Roman Empire, being assembled out of many conquered peoples, each with their own system of faith, was notoriously liberal in its religious policy. They banned human sacrifice and mutilation, and they had laws against sorcery (magic with criminal intent), as well as against soothsayers, for fear of popular unrest. But temples, priesthoods and festivals of various gods were not only tolerated, but often supported with public funds.

Jupiter was the traditional name for the supreme god, but in the second century, a sort of monotheism was promoted by emperors through the cult of the Sun god, generally identified as Apollo. *Sol Invictus* appears on Roman coins from the reign of Antoninus Pius (138-161), Aurelian (270-275) established the festival of *Dies Natalis Solis Invicti* (“birthday of the Invincible Sun”) on 25 December, and Constantine decreed *dies solis* (“Sunday”), a day of rest, before switching his allegiance from Apollo to Christ — who, it was found out later, happened to have the same birthday. The cult of *Sol Invictus* was too political to be popular, but it shows that monotheism was never incompatible with polytheism.

Philosophers and their students had little interest in cults, and disapproved of the popular “superstition” that went with some. But they saw no incompatibility between the uniqueness of the divine and the plurality of its manifestations or representations. They used the words “God” (*Zeus*), “the god” (*o theos*) or “the gods” (*oi theoi*) interchangeably (for example Cicero in *On the nature of the gods*). In the understanding of the literati at least, polytheism was an inclusive monotheism.

Greek-speaking Romans could find in Plato's works plenty of monotheistic statements. From the 3rd century, they could learn from Plotinus's (through Porphyry's *Enneads*) that the universe is the emanation of the One, who gave rise to Universal Intelligence, the Idea of Ideas, which in turn gave rise to the Soul of the World, the germinating force that animates all living beings. Emperor Julian (361-363), known to Christians as "the apostate", was essentially a Neoplatonist monotheist.

Stoicism had the most lasting, albeit the most diffuse influence until the 3rd century, according to Anthony Long.^[2] It could have become for Europeans what Confucianism is for the Chinese, for it shares a similar focus on the public good, combined with a sense of Providence and a soft, open concept of the divine (Cosmos, Heaven). It had the favor of emperor Marcus Aurelius (161-180), whose reign was "possibly the only period in history in which the happiness of a great people was the sole object of government," according to Edward Gibbon.^[3] Meanwhile, if we were to believe Celsus, Christianity attracted only "the foolish, dishonorable and stupid ... slaves, women and little children."^[4]

From the premise that God is infinite by definition, the Stoics deduced that nothing can exist outside of God. Consequently, God and the *Kosmos* are one (*kosmos* translates as "order", and refers to both the universe and its ordering principle). They were "immanent monotheists," insisting on the presence of God in all things and beings, and in humans in particular. "Since our souls are so bound up and in contact with God as parts of Him and portions of Him, does not God perceive every motion of these parts as being his own motion connate with himself?" (Epictetus, *Discourses* I, 14).

This didn't prevent the Stoics from addressing God in prayer. In his famous *Hymn to Zeus*, Cleanthes (3rd century BC) called God: "Nature's great Sovereign, ruling all by law," to whom men must turn their minds in order to live "the noble life, the only true wealth." He prayed that people who do evil by ignorance can be

enlightened: “Scatter, O Father, the darkness from their souls.” The Stoic Seneca wrote in the 1st century AD, in his *Letter to Lucilius* 41:

We do not need to uplift our hands towards heaven, or to beg the keeper of a temple to let us approach his idol’s ear, as if in this way our prayers were more likely to be heard. God is near you, he is with you, he is within you. This is what I mean, Lucilius: a holy spirit indwells within us, one who marks our good and bad deeds, and is our guardian. As we treat this spirit, so are we treated by it. Indeed, no man can be good without the help of God. Can one rise superior to fortune unless God helps him to rise? He it is that gives noble and upright counsel.

Is God Jealous?

In contrast to *philosophical cosmotheism*, Jewish monotheism is exclusive *and* theophobic — even theoclastic, according to Jan Assmann.^[5] Yahweh is “the jealous god”, whose first commandment to his people is: “You shall have no other gods before me” (Exodus 20:3, Deuteronomy 5:7). It was because of their contempt for the gods that the Jews were called “atheists” and reputed as a “race hated by the gods” in return (Tacitus, *Histories* V, 3). Yahweh’s jealousy is contagious and murderous. Phinehas “was possessed of the same jealousy as [Yahweh],” when he murdered an Israelite and his Midianite wife with a single strike of spear, because foreign wives contaminate the tribe with their foreign gods.^[6] Phinehas was rewarded for his heroic zeal with “the priesthood forever” for his descendants (Numbers 25).

In the Books of Kings, the kings of Judah and Israel are sorted in two categories: those who “did what is pleasing to Yahweh” by destroying all sanctuaries, altars and statues of other gods, like Hezekiah or Josiah (2Kings 18, 23) and those who “did what displeases Yahweh” by tolerating them, like Manasseh (2Kings 21). Prophets and kings who slaughter the Canaanite priests of Baal by the hundreds are heroes (Elijah in 1Kings 18, Jehu in 2Kings 10).

Yahweh's jealousy is a justification for genocide: Moses orders the extermination of all living beings in some conquered cities, "lest they teach you to do all these abominations which they do to their gods" (Deuteronomy 20:18). Deuteronomy 13 orders the stoning to death of any Israelite who promotes the worship of any of "the gods of the peoples near or far who surround you." And if some Israelites participate in the worship of other gods "in one of the cities that Yahweh your god has given you to live in," the whole city must be exterminated and reduced to ashes. "The belief in a cruel god makes a cruel man," wrote Thomas Paine (*The Age of Reason*, 1794); more to the point, the belief in a genocidal god makes a genocidal people.

The Jewish God was not made less jealous when he fathered a Son and became the Christian God. For peoples throughout the Roman Empire, the Christian religion was unique, not for its claim that one man was conceived by a divine father with a mortal woman and overcame death, but for its fanatic intolerance of any other cults.

Christianity accepts the two premises that the god of the Jews is God, and the gods of all other peoples are demons, a Greek word that Christians redefined as Satan's agents. "What the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God" (1Corinthians 10:20). And since the gods were everywhere in pre-Christian times — in every social activity —, now the whole world became infested by demons.

From the time of Constantine's sons, when God's jealousy became imperial law, Christianization has meant the destruction of temples and altars, first in the cities, then in the countryside, and finally in every home. In 346, Firmicus Maternus, invoking Deuteronomy 13:6-9, informs Constantius and Constans that Christ expects from them "the extermination of idolatry and the overthrow of the pagan temples," so that "the devil should be utterly overthrown and laid low by your laws." Besides, there is gold to be plundered:

Take away, yes, calmly take away, Most Holy Emperors, the adornments of the temples. Let the fire of the mint or the blaze of the smelters melt them down, and confiscate all the votive offerings to your own use and ownership.^[7]

With impunity, the saints and their monks vandalized pagan shrines throughout the Roman world in the late 4th and 5th century, exactly like the sectarians of Yahweh who go about destroying Canaanite sanctuaries in the Books of Kings. In the words of the non-Christian scholar Libanius (c. 314-392), pleading without success to emperor Theodosius to prevent the destruction of a temple in Edessa:

[Christian monks] hasten to attack the temples with sticks and stones and bars of iron ... Then utter desolation follows, with the stripping of roofs, demolition of walls, the tearing down of statues and the overthrow of altars, and priests must either keep quiet or die. After demolishing one, they scurry to another and to a third, and trophy is piled on trophy, in contravention of the law.^[8]

According to Ramsay MacMullen, such Christian zealots destroyed “no doubt more of the architectural and artistic treasure of their world than any passing barbarians thereafter.” Thus ends his book *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, another masterpiece:

Silencing, burning, and destruction were all forms of theological demonstration; and when the lesson was over, monks and bishops, generals and emperors, had driven the enemy from our field of vision. What we can no longer see, we cannot report. Here, then, my book ends.^[9]

In his follow-up volume, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, MacMullen illustrates the bloody persecutions of the recalcitrant non-Christians under emperors Justinian (527-565) and Tiberius (578-582). Quoting

from John of Ephesus (*Ecclesiastical History* III, 27-32), he tells how the army commander Theophilus was sent by Tiberius, first to Baalbek-Heliopolis in Phoenicia, to teach the unbaptized a lesson:

“[He] seized many of them and punished them as their impudence merited, humbling their pride and crucifying and killing them.” When their like were denounced “in every region and city of the east, especially Antioch,” he proceeded against these populations, too, summoning the high priest of Antioch to him at Edessa. The old man killed himself, but his elderly associates were terrified into denouncing as his fellow-worshiper no less than Anatolius, the vice-prefect, provincial governor, and apparently a senator as well. Anatolius was therefore remanded to a Constantinopolitan court (ca. 579), tried and found guilty, tortured, torn up by wild beasts, and then crucified, while his aide died of his tortures.^[10]

Christian emperors and their armed bishops did to their Gentile subjects exactly what Jews would have done had they been in the same position of power. It is by Bolshevik-style systematic persecution and terror, and not by any other means, that the inhabitants of the Roman empire were converted over the course of one century.^[11]

The Jewish God’s jealousy was even aggravated in Christianity by his new trinitarian susceptibility. You don’t worship him properly if you don’t confess that he is homoiousianly three persons in one. Even before Christians were able to persecute non-Christians with imperial backing, they persecuted each other on such dogmatic matters. And when it had no more “pagans” to “convert”, the Papal church turned back against heretics with renewed vigor, transforming Christendom into what Robert I. Moore has described as a “persecuting society.”^[12]

Knowledge of Good and Evil

God's exclusivism is only one aspect of Judeo-Christian monotheism. Let's turn to other aspects that are also best apprehended in context and in contrast with the religious and philosophical culture of the Gentiles, influenced by Stoicism in particular.

Philosophers traditionally distinguished between three branches of teaching: logics, physics, and ethics. According to a metaphor attributed to the Stoic Chrysippus of Soli (3rd century BC), philosophy is like a fertile orchard whose fence is logic, whose trees are physics, and whose fruit is ethics. There are variations on this agricultural metaphor: for Seneca, philosophy is like a tree whose roots are logic, whose trunk is physics and whose branches are ethics (the fruit, then, could be the joy produced by the ethical life).[\[13\]](#)

Logic is the beginning. It is the only human faculty that can contemplate itself, noted Epictetus (*Discourses* I, 1). According to the Stoics, the Cosmos is rational, and human reason (logos) is man's participation in the divine Reason (Logos).

Physics, the study of Nature (*Phusis*), encompasses both what we now call science and metaphysics. The cosmotheistic considerations presented above belong there.

Ethics is the knowledge of good and evil. Stoic ethics is based on logic, through a discipline of "inner discourse" aimed at distinguishing what is under our control from what is not: "We must make the best use that we can of the things which are in our power, and use the rest according to their nature" (Epictetus, *Discourses* I, 1). But ethics is also based on physics, because virtue requires a metaphysical understanding of the holistic interconnectedness of all beings. The virtuous man tries to live in harmony with Nature and with his own nature, and to be a factor of social harmony in every situation.

At least since Socrates, philosophers taught the equation of wisdom, virtue and happiness: it is by knowing and then doing what is right that one takes care of one's soul and finds true joy and peace of mind. The Stoics did not base the

encouragement to virtue on the belief in some post-mortem retribution, and rarely speculated about the afterlife.

Nevertheless, they took for granted that there was an immortal divine principle in man. The philosophers' view on the immortality of the soul, however, was not necessarily egalitarian. According to Plato, man "partakes of immortality" only to the extent that he "thinks thoughts that are immortal and divine" (*Timæus*, 90b-c). Therefore, to philosophize is to learn to die (*Phaedo*). In practice, this meant, to Marcus Aurelius: "The perfection of conduct consists in using each day we live as if it were our last" (*Meditations* VII,69).

To summarize the main principles of Greco-Roman Stoicism:

- 1. Knowledge through logic:** Reason is the gift of the gods to man. It is the highest faculty of the soul, through which man can understand the world, himself and the divine Logos.
- 2. Rational ethics:** By reason alone man can know good from evil, which will make him want to be virtuous. Virtue is fulfilling one's purpose in the Cosmos. Do not seek happiness, but seek virtue and you will find happiness. Since reason is universal, there exist universally valid moral principles.
- 3. Immanent monotheism, or Cosmotheism:** Through Logos and Providence (Stoic concepts later appropriated by Christianity), God is immanent in the world. God is the soul of the universe, manifesting itself in a multiplicity of ways ("the gods").

Additional point: The Greeks invented political philosophy, as opposed to political theology. Philosophers naturally thought that philosophy was necessary for good government, but few — not even Plato — believed in Plato's utopia of the philosopher-kings: "Do not expect Plato's Republic," Marcus Aurelius advised himself (*Meditations* IX, 29). The Stoics generally favored a constitution based on

“a mixture of democracy, kingship and aristocracy” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives* VII, 131).[\[14\]](#)

The Jewish Paradigm

The Judaic religious paradigm, expressed in the Hebrew Bible, differs from the Stoic paradigm in three essential respects:

1. The Bible emphasizes revelation, not reason. *Whereas the Stoic God is accessible through human reason, which is an extension of the divine Logos, the Jewish God has to “reveal” himself miraculously to make Himself known to His chosen. He requires not reason, but belief and obedience.* It is necessary to believe that it is indeed God the Creator who speaks in the Book, and it is necessary to obey his commandments. The God of the Jews imposes his Law (Torah), which needs no rational justification.

2. The God-given Law, not human reason or wisdom, determines right and wrong. *Whereas the Stoic affirms man’s capacity to know good from evil through reason, there is no other moral code for the Jew than obedience to God’s commandments, however absurd or scandalously immoral they may seem to natural morality. The Bible’s moral codes are only valid for the Chosen people, and have no universal value. Contrary to what is suggested by rigged translations, the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5:17-20) has no universal scope (as best [explained by John Hartung](#)).*

3. God is transcendent, not immanent. *Whereas the Stoic God is the immanent soul of the Cosmos, the Jewish God is external to His creation. He is a person, with a peculiar character, tastes and opinions. He pre-exists to his creation, and remains external to it. He is the maker and the owner of the world (Leviticus 25:23), retaining the right to intervene on it according to his whims. The biblical God does not manifest himself in immutable natural laws — a notion foreign to the Torah — but rather in miracles and cataclysms.*

Whereas cosmotheism fosters trust in the universe, Jewish monotheism impresses fear and terror, not just on the Goyim, but on the Jews themselves: “And if, in spite of this, you will not listen to me but go against me, I shall go against you in fury and punish you seven times over for your sins” (Leviticus 26:27). A good Jew is a God-fearing Jew, and I would argue that the fear of God is the backbone of Jewishness (read my two related articles, [“Fear and Terror”](#) and [“The Cursed People”](#)).

Whereas the Greeks and Romans assumed that rulers are best advised by philosophers, who try to think logically, the Bible emphasizes that kings must obey the priests, and especially the prophets, who get their orders directly from God — which meant destroying all sanctuaries other than the temple of Jerusalem.

The antinomy between Hebraism and Hellenism is remarkably metaphorized in the third chapter of the Book of Genesis, probably written during the early Hellenistic period (like the story of Joseph in Genesis 37-50, and the books of Daniel, of Esther, of Job, of Ezra and Nehemiah, and a few more).^[15] In this myth of the Garden of Eden, “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” is an almost transparent designation of philosophy. The Serpent speaks like Socrates or Plato when he says that, by the fruit of that tree, “your eyes will open and you will be like gods [*elohim*], who know good and evil” (Genesis 3:5). The message of Greek wisdom is demonized, for contradicting Yahweh’s demand of unconditional obedience to the most absurd commandment. Greek philosopher Celsus saw the trick, and declared that the god of the Jews must be the enemy of mankind, “since he cursed the serpent, from whom the first men received the knowledge of good and evil” (Origen, *Against Celsus* VI, 28). Some early Gnostics thought the same, considering Yahweh as an evil archon and the Serpent as an avatar of Christ. I’ll write more on that some other time.

The Christian Lord God

Christianity is a syncretic combination of Hebraism and Hellenism. Its theology was crafted with the Greeks' philosophical toolbox, but the raw material is mostly Jewish. It includes the Jewish premise that "Yahweh, the god of Israel" is God. And so, although the Christian God has been somewhat softened by fatherhood, He is still the Jewish God.

1. Just like the Jewish God, the Christian God cannot be understood by reason alone: Revelation is the prerequisite. The Law is now replaced by dogmas, which is a more alienating form of legalism: the Jew has the obligation to do, but the Christian has the obligation to believe. This goes with an even greater contempt for human reason: "the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God" (1Corinthians 3:19). In the words of Tertullian of Carthage: "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Academy to do with the Church? ... We want no curious disputation after possessing Christ Jesus, no inquisition after receiving the gospel!" (*Prescription Against Heretics*, 7). The Church Fathers condemn the philosophers' *libido sciendi* as a mortal vanity, a concupiscence born of our corruption or of the Devil.

2. Christianity affirms the necessity of God's revelation and of the Church's sacraments for man's salvation, and the incapacity of human reason alone to determine morality. It was on this issue that saint Augustine came into violent conflict with the British monk Pelagius. Without denying the necessity of grace, Pelagius asserted that moral perfection was attainable through the practice of virtue, because man's freedom resides in his reason, which "is not vitiated by original sin." This was a dangerous doctrine for the Church, since it nullified the necessity of the sacraments, and therefore the power of priests.

3. The Christian God is still the anthropomorphic Jewish God who created and owns the world — and plans on destroying it at some point. He chooses, orders, complains, curses, and demands obedience. He is a transcendent person (three persons, if you insist), accessible only in a person-to-person relationship. The medieval Church conceived that relationship on the model of the feudal bond

between vassal and suzerain. This led to the customary Catholic gesture of prayer being borrowed from the rite of homage, which required the vassal to join his hands and the suzerain to take them in his own (*immixtio manuum*). This gesture also appears in clerical iconography, as a symbol of the submission of kings to the suzerainty of the popes (head picture: Charlemagne before Leo III).



By promoting this feudal concept of a hierarchical relationship between man and his God, the Church could insert itself into that relationship as exclusive mediator, through sacraments and “indulgences”, just like the Levites had done in Biblical times. The cosmic, immanent vision of God, on the other hand, abolishes the distance between man and God, and consequently the distinction between clergy and laity. That is why mystical experiences of the cosmic God were always viewed with suspicion.

Besides producing a closing of the philosophical mind, the concept of God as Lord contained the seeds of its own destruction: man’s revolt against God, properly unthinkable in the paradigm of cosmotheism. In the final analysis, it was Yahweh who killed God in the West.

The Cosmotheist Resistance and the German revival

Until the Gregorian Reformation of the 11th century, the cosmic God could still find some limited freedom of expression. John Scotus (Erigena) sounded like a Stoic philosopher when he explained in the *Division of Nature*, written about 867, that “God is all in all. ... We should not understand God and the creatures as two things removed from one another, but as one and the same thing.”^[16] Everything is in God and God is in everything. God manifests Himself in the union of all opposites, Scotus added, which led him to deny the devil’s real power: evil is merely a “misdirection of the will.” Scotus proclaimed the sovereignty of reason in man, superior even to the authority of Scripture, which is provisional. He was twice condemned by the archbishop of Lyon, but found protection at the court of Charles the Bald. He was a lay scholar, something that soon became inconceivable.

Despite Church censorship, Scotus’ work was rediscovered in the 12th century by Amaury of Chartres, master of logic at the University of Paris. After Amaury’s death in 1206, his followers were hunted down for teaching “that God was the formal principle of all things” (as reported by Thomas Aquinas). The Amauricians, write a recent scholar, believed in “the immanent presence of the Divinity in the whole of Creation, which renders useless the grace conferred by the sacraments.”^[17] In 1210, fourteen of them, including some priests and deacons, were sentenced to the stake, and ten others to life imprisonment.



But the “heresy”, which is today labelled “pantheism” (a word coined in 1705) but was then denounced as “atheism”, survived, as witness the interrogations of around a hundred “heretics” in southern Germany in 1270 (never forget the quotation marks in “heresy” and “heretics”, for those accused never claimed to be anything but good Christians).

We don’t know whether Master Eckhart (1260-1328) had ever heard of Scotus or Amaury, but he expressed his mystical insights in powerful cosmotheistic formulas: “The eye with which God looks at me is the eye with which I look at Him; my eye and His eye are identical.” His proposition that the human soul is uncreated because it is a particle of God, was condemned by Pope John XXII’s bull *In agro dominico* in 1329.

Eckhart was a Dominican monk who taught in Latin at the Sorbonne, but preached in German to nuns, who preserved notes of his sermons. As Ernst Benz explains in *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, the German language had so far had no share in philosophical and theological discourse, and Eckhart's novel use of it to convey his mystical experiences had a considerable influence on later German thought: thanks to Eckhart, German philosophy started on a mystical and cosmotheist basis.^[18]

Eckhart was condemned, but his German sermons survived, to be rediscovered by Franz von Baader, a friend of Hegel (1770-1831), and they influenced German idealist and romantic thinkers of that period.

Another later German mystic, Jakob Boehme (1575-1624), equally impressed Fichte, Schelling and Hegel. "The whole of nature", Boehme wrote in *Aurora*, "is the body or corporeality of God." Like Scotus, Boehme saw creation as a universal and eternal dialectical process: each thing can only be revealed by another that resists it. Light cannot be revealed without darkness, good cannot be revealed without evil, spirit without the resistance of matter.^[19] Boehme was lucky enough to live in Saxony, then one of the most tolerant Protestant states.

His Italian contemporary Giordano Bruno was condemned to the stake in 1600, after seven years of imprisonment with repeated torture. A Dominican monk and a teacher at the Sorbonne, Bruno went further than Copernicus' heliocentrism by teaching that the universe had neither center nor circumference. Refusing to recant, he began his defense before the Congregation of the Holy Office, otherwise known as the Inquisition, by stating: "I teach the infinity of the universe and the action of divine power in its infinity."^[20]

Scotus, Amaury, Eckhart, Boehme and Bruno are some of the mystics and intellectuals that Sigrid Hunke (1913-1999) discusses in her book *Europas Einege religion* (not translated in English), an uplifting apology of the "heretical" cosmotheistic tradition revived by post-Kantian German philosophy.

Hunke includes in that tradition Spinoza (1632-1677), to whom the term “pantheist” was first applied. German philosophical circles were shaken in 1785, when Jacobi revealed that his friend Lessing (1729-1781), an immensely popular thinker, had told him: “*Hen Kai Pân*. One and All. I know nothing else. ... There is no other philosophy than Spinoza’s.” The ensuing “[pantheism controversy](#)” is the backdrop to Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of the Faculty of Judgment*, published in 1790, and contributed in no small way to post-Kantian idealism.

Like Lessing, Hegel (1770-1831) was much impressed by Spinoza. He wrote in one of his early works, *Faith and Knowledge* (1802): “Spinoza constitutes such a crucial point for modern philosophy that we might say in effect that there is a choice between Spinozism and no philosophy at all.”^[21] Twenty-five years later, Hegel wrote: “Philosophy properly speaking begin in the ninth century with John Scottus Erigena.”^[22] He admired Giordano Bruno as well, and devoted to him a long [section of his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*](#). “Bruno asserted, in the first place, the unity of life and the universality of the World-Soul, and, in the second place, the indwelling presence of reason.”

For Hegel, everything that is real is rational, and the purpose of philosophy is to “bring this rationality to consciousness.” Here are more quotes from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*:

To him who looks at the world rationally the world looks rationally back; the two exist in a reciprocal relationship.

Nature is rational within itself, and ... it is this actual reason present within it which knowledge must investigate and grasp conceptually—not the shapes and contingencies which are visible on the surface, but nature’s eternal harmony, conceived, however, as the law of essence immanent within it.

What man seeks in this situation, ensnared here as he is in finitude on every side, is the region of a higher, more substantial truth, in which all

oppositions and contradictions in the finite can find their final resolution, and freedom its full satisfaction. This is the region of absolute, not finite, truth. The highest truth, truth as such, is the resolution of the highest opposition and contradiction.^[23]

Following in the footsteps of Goethe, Hegel made a heroic effort to free Western thinking from the chains of Jewish monotheism. Although he seemed reluctant to recognize it, his work was the revenge of Stoicism.^[24] It is an irony of History — the “World Spirit” works in mysterious ways — that this had to come from the former Barbarians.

We know how this ended, however: “*Judea Declares War on Germany*” (*Daily Express*, March 24, 1933).

Notes

^[1] Ramsay MacMullen, *Paganism in the Roman Empire*, Yale University Press, 1981, pp. 87-88.

^[2] Anthony A. Long, *Stoic Studies*, Cambridge UP, 1996. The only serious competitor at the time—besides Platonism, which was a common legacy of every school—was Epicureanism. Epicurus’ system relied on the atomist materialism of Democritus, and taught that chance and necessity govern the world.

Epicureanism lacked the Stoic sense of “Providence” (Greek *pronoia*, Latin *providentia*), as Marcus Aurelius emphasized in his *Meditations* by the repeated disjunction: “Either providence or atoms.”

^[3] Gibbon includes Marcus Aurelius’ predecessor Antoninus Pius in that assessment. Quoted in Lisa Hill and Eden Blazejak, *Stoicism and the Western Political Tradition*, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2021.

^[4] Origen, *Contra Celsum* 3.44. “In the early second century AD, Christianity already numbered among its ranks some senators of Rome (admittedly only a

few) and imperial functionaries” (Peter Heather, *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion*, Penguin Books, 2023, p. 20).

[5] From the Greek *klao*, “break into pieces”. Jan Assmann, *The Price of Monotheism*, Stanford University Press, 2009.

[6] Exodus 34:14, Numbers 25:1-2, Deuteronomy 7:3-4, Nehemiah 13:27.

[7] Firmicus Maternus, *The Error of the Pagan Religions*, x.7 and xxviii.6 (trans. Clarence A. Forbes, Newman Press, 1970).

[8] Peter Heather, *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion*, Penguin Books, 2023, p. 115.

[9] Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianizing the Roman Empire (A.D. 100-400)*, Yale UP, 1984, p. 119.

[10] Ramsay MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries*, Yale UP, 1997, p.

[11] Read also Peter Heather, *Christendom: The Triumph of a Religion*, Penguin Books, 2023. I’ll write more on this subject later.

[12] Robert I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250*, second edition, Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

[13] Juliette Dross, « Les métamorphoses de l’arbre de la philosophie, de l’ancien stoïcisme à Descartes », *Revue de philosophie ancienne*, 2011, 29 (2), pp. 75-96, hal.science/hal-03146966/

[14] Lisa Hill and Eden Blazejak, *Stoicism and the Western Political Tradition*, Palgrave/Macmillan, 2021.

[15] According to biblical scholars of the “minimalist” school, the Tanakh betrays an ideology elaborated during the Persian era, but its final edition dates from the

Hasmoneans. Read for example Philip Davies, *In Search of "Ancient Israel": A Study in Biblical Origins*, Journal of the Study of the Old Testament, 1992.

[16] John J. O'Meara, *Introduction* to: John J. O'Meara and Ludwig Bieler (eds.), *The Mind of Eriugena*, Irish University Press 1973, quoted in www.ontology.co/eriugena.htm

[17] Marie-Thérèse D'Alverny, « un fragment du procès des Aumauriciens », *Archives d'histoire Doctrinale et Littéraire Du Moyen Age*, vol. 18, 1950, pp. 325-336, www.jstor.org/stable/44403647

[18] Ernst Benz , *The Mystical Sources of German Romantic Philosophy*, Pickwick Publications, 1983, p. 8-10.

[19] Nicolas Berdiaev , *Études sur Jacob Boehme* (1945), 2020, p. 6.

[20] Sigrid Hunke, *La Vraie religion de l'Europe. La foi des « hérétiques »*, Livre-Club du Labyrinthe, 1985, pp. 75-83.

[21] Pierre Macherey, *Hegel or Spinoza*, University of Minnesota Press, 1979, p. 13.

[22] G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy 1825-6. Volume III: Medieval and Modern Philosophy*, Revised Edition, Translated and edited by George F. Brown, Oxford University Press 2009, p. 42, quoted in www.ontology.co/eriugena.htm

[23] *Hegel's Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, quoted in Robert Stern, *The Routledge Guidebook to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, Routledge, 2001, pp. 11, 17.

[24] Hegel was not the last word: Schopenhauer vehemently opposed him (in a typical Hegelian dialectical way, actually), proclaiming that in the beginning is not Reason, but Will. This was still, somehow, cosmotheism.